

# Gravina Access Project

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**What's the best way to improve access between Gravina Island and Ketchikan, Saxman, and other Ketchikan-area communities and coordinate this work with the Ketchikan Gateway Borough's land-planning efforts?**



**The Ketchikan Gateway Borough and the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities have initiated complementary projects to better connect the two islands, and to plan for the future. Read on for more details and for ways to become involved.**

## The Need

credit: Ketchikan Gateway Borough

Ketchikan is a gateway to the state and to a host of natural wonders and recreational opportunities that make Southeast Alaska unique. The Ketchikan Gateway Borough is working hard to find ways to expand and diversify the local economy, and improved transportation access is a major element in achieving this goal. The area's landscape, however, makes this difficult. Tucked between mountains and the ocean, Ketchikan has limited space for economic development and access to recreational areas. Local businesses are consolidated along a narrow strip paralleling the shoreline, and residents are separated from the international airport located on Gravina Island by Tongass Narrows, a major shipping and aviation corridor. Currently, a small ferry across Tongass Narrows provides the only access to the island for airport passengers, vehicles, freight, and fuel. The Gravina Access Project is just beginning to investigate providing a direct connection between Ketchikan (Revillagigedo Island) and Gravina Island.

## The Players

Many organizations are coming together to assess the ways in which transportation improvements in the area can advance the borough's economic and development goals and to help the borough plan for the future. These organizations are following the lead of borough residents who have put these projects in motion with continued requests for improved access. The Ketchikan Gateway Borough is involved in the Gravina Access Project because the borough recognizes its responsibility to provide for the long-term needs of its residents. The borough has initiated Ketchikan 2020, a multifaceted planning project, to help anticipate borough-wide development, coastal, and wetlands issues. The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (ADOT&PF) has initiated the Gravina Access Project as mandated by federal legislation (see the accompanying story "The History") and as part of its mission to "improve the quality of life for Alaskans by cost-effectively providing, operating, and maintaining safe, environmentally sound, and reliable transportation systems and public facilities."

HDR Alaska, Inc., with internationally recognized bridge, tunnel, and ferry experts, will undertake the Gravina Access Project on behalf of the ADOT&PF and will maintain a project office in Ketchikan. Local specialists involved in this project include Klugherz and Associates and Stephen Peters and Associates. HDR will also lead the planning efforts for Ketchikan 2020 to ensure coordination between the two projects.



# A Gateway . . .

**"At last. We have begun the long-awaited work toward the much-needed access to Gravina Island."**

**- statement about the Gravina Access Project from  
Borough Mayor John "Jack" Shay**

## **The Gravina Access Project**

Is it a bridge? Is it a tunnel? Is it an enhanced ferry system? While no one is without speculation, the truth is that there will be no answer until the ADOT&PF completes its studies and, with input from affected agencies and the public, selects a "preferred alternative." Because this project is funded by federal dollars (see the accompanying story titled "The History"), the project must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NEPA requires the study of all reasonable alternatives and disclosure of environmental impacts associated with each alternative to the public and decision-makers. Topics that will be considered in the process include:

Land Use  
Economic Impacts  
Population, Employment and Community Character  
Cultural Resources  
Air Quality  
Noise  
Water Quality  
Wetlands  
Fish and Wildlife



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## **The History**

Improving the connection between these two islands has long been a topic of interest.

- In 1973, the Ketchikan International Airport is constructed and shuttle ferry service begins.
- In 1973, the State of Alaska examined eight proposed bridge crossings.
- In 1981, the Ketchikan Gateway Borough examined bridge and underwater tube crossings.
- In 1984, Tippetts-Abbett-McCarthy-Stratton provided a cost analysis of proposed bridge, tube, and ferry crossings.
- In 1988, the Ketchikan Gateway Borough passed Resolution 794 supporting a "hard link" crossing and the preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS).
- In 1989, the Ketchikan Gateway Borough studied road routes on Pennock and Gravina Islands to the airport.
- In 1991, the Alaska Legislature authorized funding for the Ketchikan "Hard Link" EIS.
- In 1994, the ADOT&PF prepared an in-house draft EIS of ferry, bridge, and tunnel crossing options.

Finally, in 1998 the Federal Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA-21) allocated funds specifically for this project. Additional funding will be required to begin construction of a selected access alternative.

## **Why Another Study?**

With so many reports on the shelves, people are bound to ask: Why another study? As discussed earlier, NEPA requires that projects supported by federal funds identify and define impacts to the environment so that decision-makers and the public are fully informed. Many years have passed since ADOT&PF prepared its last study, and changes in the area have prompted changes to the purpose of and need for the project. While past studies highlighted the need to improve access solely to the airport, the current study broadens the scope of the project to include access to Gravina Island.

## Ketchikan 2020

The Ketchikan Gateway Borough has recognized an important opportunity for concurrent planning to complement the Gravina Access Project. Ketchikan 2020 is a multifaceted planning project that will coordinate the Gravina Access Project with four areas of borough-wide planning:

**Gravina Island Comprehensive Plan.** The opportunity to create a Gravina Island development plan in conjunction with the Gravina Access Project enables residents to participate in setting the future vision for the island while the transportation link is being identified. Creation of the comprehensive plan during the project's NEPA activities will allow for a greater level of citizen participation and an opportunity for creating positive, long-lasting development on Gravina Island.

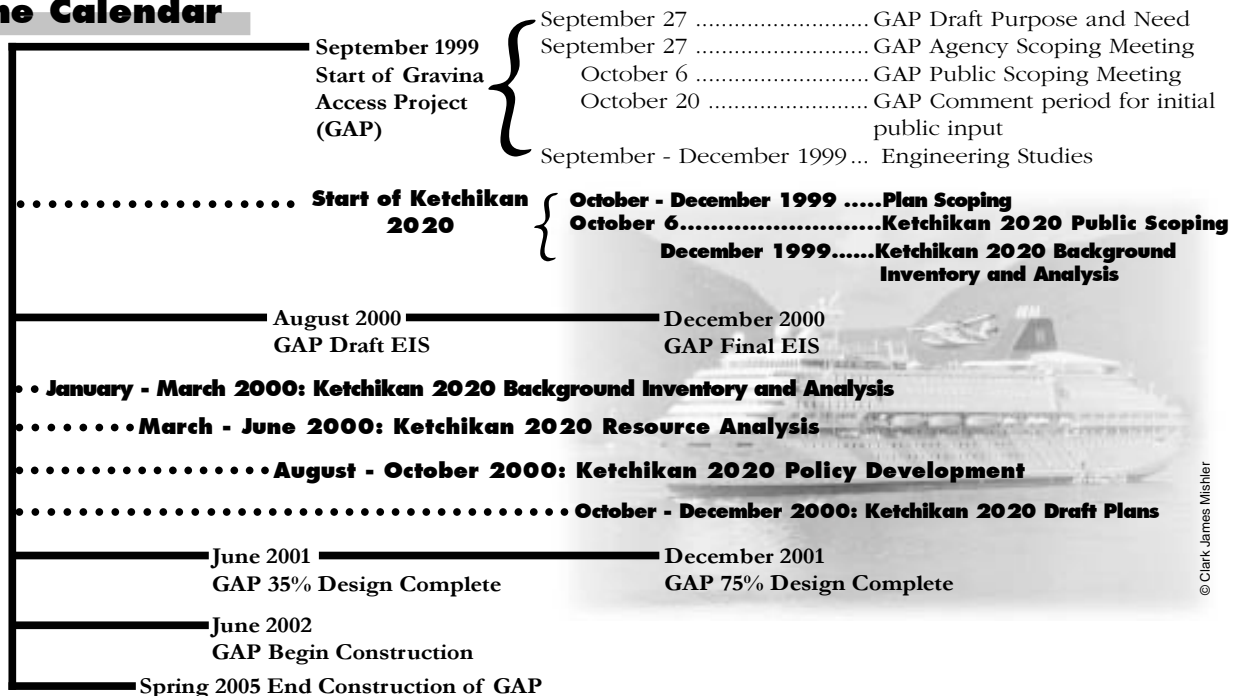
**Coastal Management Program Update.** The goal of this update is to strengthen the borough's say in local, state, and federal development decisions, give increased predictability to developers, and also protect sensitive habitats and areas important to the borough's residents and economy.

**Wetlands Development Plan.** Much of the borough is regulated wetlands and the pressure to develop wetlands is increasing. A consistent, more predictable review process is needed to avoid lengthy reviews of individual permits and to ensure that local interests are incorporated into decisions concerning wetland use. The wetland development plan will provide developers with a greater degree of certainty and regulators with assurance that piecemeal development in wetlands will not cause adverse cumulative impacts.

**Overall Borough Comprehensive Plan Update.** Ultimately, the various planning efforts will support a broad and detailed look at present land use and future growth in the borough. The borough's intent is to consolidate the current planning into an Overall Borough Comprehensive Plan update, known as Ketchikan 2020. The purpose is to guide the borough toward a desired future design based upon community values, projected growth, and land development needs.

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## The Calendar



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**"From a local government point of view, we want this project to succeed."**

**- statement about the Gravina Access Project from  
City of Ketchikan Mayor Bob Weinstein for the Ketchikan Daily News (January 29, 1999)**

**... to the Future**

## Public Involvement

What's the best way to connect two islands in a region where ferries, cruise ships, fishing boats, recreational boats, floatplanes, and jets negotiate an intricate transportation network? What are the potential environmental impacts of such a connection? These are a few in a long list of questions ADOT&PF has for you. Leaders of the Gravina Access Project need to hear from you so they know what will make the project work for you.

There will be many opportunities for input such as community meetings, open houses, and interest group briefings. If your group would like to schedule time to discuss your concerns, please contact Anne Brooks (1-888-520-4886 or 586-9833), the Gravina Access Project's public involvement coordinator.

## Upcoming Events

### Public Scoping Meeting (Gravina Access Project and Ketchikan 2020)

**Location:** Ted Ferry Civic Center

**Time:** October 6, 1999

Open House: 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Presentations and Q&A: 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Open House: 7:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

## Project Coordination

Part of the Gravina Access Project public involvement process includes coordinating with other agencies and other projects taking place in the area.

- The U.S. Forest Service is preparing an EIS for West Gravina Island to evaluate the impacts of a timber sale and increased access for recreational pursuits.
- The Alaska Mental Health Trust is a major Gravina Island land owner and is interested in making Trust Lands on Gravina Island work for their mandated purpose.
- The Alaska Department of Natural Resources is responsible for lands within borough boundaries.
- ADOT&PF is preparing a master plan for the Ketchikan International Airport (with the help of USKH).

We know your time is valuable, and we will do our best to coordinate public meetings with other projects so you can easily stay informed.

## Contacts:

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### Ketchikan Project Office

For project information and updates, please visit our project office in Ketchikan in the NBA Building:

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### Website

You can also keep up to date on project developments through the Gravina Access Project website:

**www.gravina-access.com** (Site under construction; available October 6, 1999).

**Look for the next edition of the Gravina Access Project newsletter in late fall or early winter. The next newsletter will discuss issues and concerns raised by the public and agencies.**